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AUTHOR Coleman, Peter
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ABSTRACT

The role of state departments of education (SDEs) is changing because of changes in patterns and demands in the administration of education. Three trends are easily identifiable--school consolidation, increased school district autonomy, and the demand for accountability. There is substantial evidence that SDEs have not readily adjusted to these changes. Most of the problems come about in the SDE's relationship with local operating units. The SDE's interest and role in the input, operation, and output of school districts are examined in order to draw inferences for the future organization of SDEs. The SDE's future role can include equalizing educational opportunity, controlling and limiting local autonomy, and continuing concern with accountability and cost-effectiveness in public education. A fourth area, policy development, is also open to SDEs. If SDEs are to assume any relevance to contemporary patterns of administration, they must re-examine their functions and retrain and reassess their staffs to meet these new functions. (Author/IRT)

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RESTRUCTURING DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION TO MEET CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS: A VIEW FROM THE FIELD

A Paper Presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, October 31, 1975

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The observation that the role of departments of education (state departments of education in American terminology, see note below) is changing in North America is a common one. The change is associated with changes in patterns and demands in the administration of education, and three trends are easily identifiable.

Trends in Administration of Education

The first, now largely historical, is the re-organization of small school districts into larger units. In the United States, for example, there were 95,000 districts in 1948, and less than 18,000 in 1970. Similar re-organizations have occurred in almost every province in Canada within about the same period. (N.E.F.P., 1971; Collins, 1961) Since larger units have greater capability to provide sophisticated services such as planning, program development and evaluation, and teacher development, school district re-organization has necessarily had an impact on the functions of departments of education.

The second major change is associated with the first. Larger units have extended the principle of local autonomy considerably beyond its significance in 1950. Chief education officers are now locally appointed, and are accountable to local boards. In the United States this has resulted in the breakdown of the old county system of supervision in which a state department appointee exercised authority over a group of school districts (Campbell, 1970). In most provinces in Canada, chief education officers

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Note: Terminology differs from province to province and state to state. I have used the commonest labels.

feel responsible only to their school boards. However, Ontario is worth special mention. There, school district reorganization came very late, and consequently the extensions of local autonomy are not yet fully realized. Financial restrictions on spending and the continuing responsibility of chief education officers to the Ministry are illustrations (Hickcox, 1974).

The third change is clearly an outcome of the first two, and could be described as a demand for accountability. The decentralization of many operating decisions, and of responsibility for evaluation has left departments without means of assessing the quality of education being provided by the autonomous operating units. The breakdown of the inspectoral function and the abandoning of tests has left a vacuum in the area of assessment, making it impossible for departments to respond effectively to accountability demands.

Adjustment Problems of Departments

There is substantial evidence that departments of education have not readily adjusted to new functions or even in many cases identified them accurately. In the United States, the Advisory Council on State Departments of Education report, Focus on the Future, 1968, identified common problems as follows:

"1. Some State agencies are plagued with inadequate or antiquated structure and organization.

2. Others are operating without benefit of fully developed research and data systems, or without adequate provisions for state-wide study, evaluation and planning.

3. All are lacking - to a greater or lesser degree - appropriately prepared and experienced personnel in numbers sufficient to achieve and sustain desired levels of leadership and service."

These assessments surely strike a familiar note with people in the field in virtually any province in Canada. A study of perceptions of some American superintendents of their state department may also sound familiar:

> "For the most part, superintendents in one sample perceived state departments of education as primarily regulatory, rurally-oriented, politically dominated, unreliable, and ineffective."
> (Goldhammer, 1967)

Changes in Departments Currently Being Implemented

So much for the nature of the problems. What are the kinds of changes currently being proposed elsewhere? These mostly concern relationships with the operating units, and I would like to look at them in terms of systems theory, dealing with three categories: the input, operation and output of school districts.

With respect to input, departments have been and are still concerned with three main items - money, teachers and programs. With regard to money, the main restructuring has to do with ways of allocating state funds. Everywhere in North America there is a concern with equalization, and the purpose of the state's financial aid is to equalize the financial capability of school districts. (I dealt with the Manitoba situation at length in my report to the Department in 1972, on equality of educational opportunity.) In the United States at least, state aid programs have been effective: "there is a strong relationship between the percentage of educational revenues from the state and the amount of equalization between districts." (Mazzoni and Campbell, 1973).

With regard to teachers, and teacher certification, the only major change visible in the United States is a tendency to adopt competency based teacher certification procedures. This is a trend which has only recently developed, and it suggests a general concern with accountability and the outputs of the educational system. With regard to programs, there is some

reluctance now to mandate instructional programs. But there is a tendency to mandate necessary outcomes of programs, and allow school districts to experiment with various kinds of instructional programs until they find programs which will meet the desired goals.

With respect to operations, the regulatory functions have generally fallen into disrepute. In keeping with the increase in local autonomy, visits by Department of Education personnel to classrooms have declined dramatically over the last 20 or 30 years. Close examination of such issues as attendance, through scrutiny of school registers; school supplies and the use of designated texts; discipline; and school climate subjectively assessed by a visit to a school are no longer considered valid ways of assessing school district operations. In terms of day to day operations virtually the only contact between school districts and departments of education throughout North America takes the form of very general statistical reports on students in attendance and teachers employed, largely for financial purposes.

Both with respect to input and operations throughout North America, then, departments of education are losing interest. The new emphasis is on outputs. In the United States, this is largely a result of accountability pressures exerted by state legislatures. Legislation generally requires that the state education programs be regularly and systematically assessed in terms of achievement of specified goals or objectives.

The most noticeable new activity in most state departments of education, then, is the development of a state-wide monitoring system gathering precise information about what is happening in schools. This is of course a logical consequence of decentralization, and increases in local autonomy. The operating decisions are made locally but the consequences of these decisions, in terms of equality of educational programs, are assessed centrally.

In general, accountability schemes have been based on systems models in which input, operation and output data are all scrutinized, but with very heavy emphasis on the output data. (For a general review of the rationale, see Popham, "Objectives-Based Management Strategies for Large Educational Systems", 1972.) First, educational goals and instructional objectives are derived through some broad public needs assessment, then ways of measuring the achievement of these goals and objectives are determined and finally assessment, school by school and district by district, is undertaken. Pennsylvania provides one good example. The State Board of Education, responding to a 1963 act of its legislature, developed the Pennsylvania Plan for the Assessment of Educational Quality. The legislature required the State Board of Education

> "to develop or cause to be developed an evaluation procedure designed to measure objectively the adequacy and the efficiency of the educational programs offered by the public schools of the Commonwealth. The evaluation procedure to be developed shall include tests measuring the achievement and performance of students pursuing all of the various subjects, and courses comprising the curriculum. Evaluation procedures shall be so constructed and developed as to provide each school district with comparative data to enable directors and administrators to more readily appraise educational performance and to effectuate without delay the strengthening of the district's educational program." (Campbell et al, Educational Quality Assessment, 1968)

The Pennsylvania plan measures in all 45 variables, of which 10 are output variables and are the goals of education in Pennsylvania. Goal 1, for example, is: "Quality education should help every child acquire the greatest possible understanding of himself and an appreciation of his worthiness as a member of society." Goal 4 reads as follows: "Quality education should

help every child acquire a positive attitude towards school and towards the learning process."

To these output variables, 35 condition variables are compared. These include student variables such as "level of previous learning", "educational level of father", "continuing education (the percentage of a graduating class attending post high school institutions)". Community variables are also measured, for example, the rural/urban location of the school. School and staff variables measured include "instructional cost per pupil", "retention rate of the school", "ratio of library books to students", "pupil-teacher ratio", "teacher education level", "teacher salaries", "teacher age", "teacher perception of school climate", and "student attendance".

The scheme is a massive attempt to identify the factors affecting student achievement, to parcel out those influential factors outside the control of the school, and to assess student achievement in relation to factors within the control of the school. Clearly, a department of education in possession of such information could focus its efforts to improve instruction on the important issues.

General Functions of Departments in the Future

From this survey of what is happening elsewhere, I would now like to draw some inferences about the general functions of departments of education in the future, and about how innovative departments are arriving at a reasonable structure with which to carry out those functions. In terms of general functions of departments, there seem to be at least three, relating to the input, operations, output analysis already suggested. The main features are outlined in the chart. A fourth possible function is also identified.

GENERAL FUNCTIONS OF DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

1. INPUT	Distributional - providing operating units with resources, largely financial.	Equalizing educational opportunity. Everywhere the key rationale for Departments of Education in relation to their resource function.
2. OPERATIONS	Regulatory - ensuring that policies, generally stated in the form of regulations, are complied with.	Controlling and limiting local autonomy, and ensuring compliance with political preferences of the government of the day.
3. OUTPUT	Evaluative - ensuring that quality is maintained amongst the diversity of district policies and programs.	Continuing concern with accountability and the cost effectiveness of public education.

4. POLICY DEVELOPMENT

For some departments, this function may be very important, depending upon the existence of such an agency in other areas of government. Many governments might wish to have a single policy development agency for all activities, health, industry, agriculture, etc., to ensure co-ordination.

With regard to the input, distributional function, it should be noted that although all districts require financial assistance from state departments of education, some require other kinds of assistance as well. "The kind of services provided by departments to large districts with professional staffs possessing a wide range of competencies will be quite different from the services needed by small districts which do not have this expertise" Phillips, 1972. Small districts might well need some resources of expertise in, for example, curriculum development.

In the second category, operations, the regulatory function was of course the major function of departments historically. It must still continue to exist, if only to ensure that policies arrived at through the normal political process can affect what happens in school districts. Such areas as teacher certification, school year and school day determination, and approved instructional materials are common in this category.

The output category is relatively new, and the one which has not been well developed in most jurisdictions at this point. Developing a systematic way of carrying out this function is difficult, expensive and requires a great deal of expertise, as the Pennsylavia illustration makes clear.

There is a fourth function, not concerning the relationship between departments and the field. A department may have a policy development function in relationship to the government. If handled within the department, this function would be carried on, presumably, by a special group reporting directly to the Minister on policy needs. Data relating to input, operations, and output would be the basic information needed for policy revisions.

Developing an Appropriate Structure

In terms of the structure of the department of education envisaged by such an analysis of functions, one could identify three or four offices or bureaus within the department, with each office having reference to one general function. The first would be the office of Resources, the second the office of Operations, the third the office of Educational Planning. Naturally there would be some overlap between the three. The fourth office, if necessary, would be Policy Development.

The third office is the one which is least likely to exist at present in any given jurisdiction, and some information on how it can be developed can be provided. Campbell and Mazzoni in their review, State Policy Making for the Public Schools: A Comparative Analysis, suggest that certain areas are critical at this time.

> "Areas demanding increased attention include planning, research, development, and evaluation. Each of these areas will require an expertise which is not often found in the personnel ordinarily recruited to state departments in the past" (1974).

They go on to recommend that a wide range of expertise be sought in staffing departments of education, and in particular, the office of educational planning.

The development of such a function of departments can be illustrated with a brief case study of South Carolina's activities. Their efforts were intended to "develop a comprehensive educational planning capability", and to use it deliberately to improve instruction. The guiding policy statement suggested that

> "there should be an annual evaluation of education quality in each school district in the state. The fundamental purpose of such an evaluation is to determine educational shortcomings as the first step in developing improvements . . . The major resources of the

> State Department of Education should be concerned with this evaluation process, and with the resulting aid to local school districts who most need improvement in achieving it. The basic yearly objectives and work plans for the Department should be structured on the findings secured from the evaluation process."

Clearly the planning function in South Carolina is seen as having priority for the moment over the regulatory and resource functions. If there is a real concern with the quality of education, then, one would anticipate such a priority.

The South Carolina scheme also requires each school district to develop its own plan for improving instruction, based on the findings of the quality assessment carried out by the planning group in the State Department.

Implementing the Restructuring of Departments

Since restructuring departments of education is implementing an innovation, general considerations common to innovating are relevant. First, departments of education are public organizations. Any reorganizations ought to involve all portions of the community, and in particular school districts, who are after all the clients, in one sense, of departments of education.

Second, as part of the restructuring, a mechanism for regular feedback from the client school districts ought to be provided, if possible, to limit the isolation and mandarinism which seems typical of departments.

Most importantly, a great deal of developmental work with staff is required. Changing titles, or offices, and drawing new organizational charts, is simply not an effective way of changing the way people function. What is required is a substantial modification of the personal goals of existing staff in the departments of education. A thorough study by Marockie (1969) of a state department of education suggested that changing goals would be a difficult and tedious process. Individual goals and organizational

goals were clearly in conflict and Marockie found that "staff had little commitment to decisions and appeared largely to be pursuing personal goals".

A very thorough retraining system, tied to an assessment procedure, to ensure the accountability of the department itself, and all its staff members, is obviously vitally important in any serious attempt to restructure departments.

In my opinion, at least, none of this is optional. If departments are to assume any relevance to contemporary patterns of administration of education, they must re-examine their functions, must become concerned with assessment, and must retrain and reassess their staffs.

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